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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Viet Fever Hints Germ Warfare

By Jack Anderson

A mysterious outbreak of black water fever in South Viet-Nam has led Army doctors to wonder whether the Communists are resorting to germ warfare.

A single Viet Cong infiltrator could wipe out or incapacitate an entire Army camp with no more than a spray gun. As a precaution, our troops in South Viet-Nam have been provided with special antibiotics and vaccines.

Significantly, the North Viet-Nam radio and press have started blaring accusations about American use of germ warfare. It is an old Communist trick to accuse their enemies of the precise tactics they are using.

During the Korean War, for example, the Communists accused the United States of scattering frozen, disease-laden mosquitoes over North Korea. When the people lit their fires, the mosquitoes supposedly thawed out and with deadly bites started an epidemic.

Puzzled American experts wondered how the Reds had conceived such a preposterous idea. Then their research turned up the interesting coin-



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cidence that Northern Siberia is infested with a hardy mosquito that comes out of the ice in the spring and bites the natives.

Frozen Insects

Apparently the Russians, taking a lesson from the mosquito, had been experimenting with frozen insects. The use of mosquitoes, ticks, lice and other carriers to spread disease is a weapons system of its own called entomological warfare.

Unfortunately, germ warfare has become such a taboo subject that the public is unaware of the danger. The blunt truth is that the United States, for all its elaborate and expensive defenses, could be devastated by a few enemy agents smuggling bacteria into the country in suitcases.

While the Russians, the Chinese and possibly the Cubans have been experimenting with germ warfare, our own scientists have not been asleep in their laboratories.

They have developed new virus and rickettsia strains against which the world has no immunity. This has been accomplished by using chemicals, radiation, ultraviolet light and other agents to produce bacteriological freaks or mutants.

Some are so deadly that universities in the vicinity of the Army's Pine Bluff, Ark., laboratories have been given

secret contracts to test the wild life constantly for the slightest sign of escaped virus. Elaborate precautions are taken, of course, to confine the bizarre germs to the labs.

A Boston outfit, called Physicians for Social Responsibility, is circulating a report that "Government officials at high policy-making levels are advocating use of biological weapons in Viet-Nam" and that "a contract has been assigned to a New England concern for a rush program to adapt biological agents for use in Viet-Nam."

Inquiring Senators learned that the alleged contract was supposed to have been granted to Travelers Research, Inc., of Hartford, Conn. However, Pentagon spokesmen emphatically denied any intention of using biological warfare in Viet Nam. The Government, they added, also has no germ warfare contract with Travelers Research.

Conflicting Stories

This column was told a different story, however, by Dr. Robert Ellis, who is directing germ warfare studies for Travelers Research. He acknowledged that the company had germ warfare contracts with the Air Force's Office of Scientific Research, the Army Materiel Command, and the Army Test Center at Dugway, Utah.

He said the company's

scientists were studying "the behavior of toxics in the environment." This would include the use of air currents for the possible delivery of toxic clouds over a target. They were also conducting other research too secret to talk about, he said.

Dr. Ellis convincingly denied, however, that their studies had anything to do with Viet-Nam, though he acknowledged their research could be applied anywhere in the world.

In view of the Pentagon's earlier denial, this column asked the Air Force to check again whether it had a germ warfare contract with Travelers Research.

A spokesman acknowledged that the company is working on germ warfare research, including a study of "attitudes within the leadership element in the U.S. Government toward the employment of incapacitating weapons and the reaction of probable public opinion."

The point is that biological warfare could be humane. Our laboratories have developed germs that could incapacitate a whole nation without killing a soul. The population would be too weak to resist an invasion, later would recover without any harmful after-effects.

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